

## Let the Compass Lead the Way by pancake-potch

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## Let the Compass Lead the Way

Jonathan sips his beer and observes the house he was standing awkwardly in. Granted he was *invited* to Steve's New Year's Eve party, but it was still uncomfortable.

Technically, they were friends- well as much as two people could be considering what joined their fates. The nervous tension he felt picking Nancy up and saying goodbye to Will in the Wheeler's basement never really left. Having her in the car next to him eased it a bit. But still.

Now he's standing in a kitchen three times the size of his and trying to avoid Tommy H's glares. Happy 1984.

He finishes his beer and grabs another, figuring more alcohol may minimize the stress of being around so many people. People he grew up with that used ignore or taunt him. And ever since Will came back his classmates snickered a little less- some even gave polite nods in his direction, but much like before he doesn't care.

He takes his beer outside and sits on a lawn chair by the pool. It's only him out there, and that's just fine. The water is a cool blue, and there's steam rising and who exactly wants to go swimming in December?

He sits and thinks about Barb and how she was *right there* and so was he, and he couldn't *do* anything.

But his brother was back and his mother managed to stay in one piece.

Jonathan also gained a friend in Nancy and an ally in Steve, and those were two things he didn't have before.

He hears the sliding door open, letting music fill the air before it shuts again. He turns to see Nancy, beer clutched in her hand and her arms wrapped around her middle.

She smiles as she takes a seat in the chair next to him. "Thought I'd

find you out here."

He smiles back because he can't help it. "It's freezing, but you know..." He doesn't finish the sentence because he doesn't need to. She gets it.

She looks down at the beer can she's toying with and seems as though she was going to say something, but he watches her eyes dart to the place Barb was sitting and her breath hitches.

He reaches over and grabs her hand, intertwining their fingers. It doesn't matter that Steve caught a glimpse of the horrors they were dealing with, because nobody knew-*really knew*- the depth of darkness they had to confront. Jonathan and Nancy were forever linked in a way that couldn't be explained in any normal fashion.

Nancy's eyes water but no tears spill out. And on the verge of the New Year, they cling to each other in the cold Indiana winter.

OoO

It's the beginning of February when Nancy decides she should break it off with Steve. Much like the cliché, it's not *him* it's *her*.

And, it really is. She doesn't feel whole, or something. There's something missing, and even as she tries to immerse herself in some sort of normalcy- it never feels *right*.

Her brother and his friends seem like they're getting better. Maybe their youth makes them more resilient. Getting Will back helps in the recovery, she's sure. She's overheard them in the basement talking about Eleven and Nancy knows they'll be okay.

But she's not. There are still nightmares that come so often that she's resigned herself to being awake at 4:30 every morning.

It's the really bad mornings that she thinks of Barb, and how only a few people know her true fate. Everyone else thinks she *ran away* and she can't even tell her parents what's happened. It's not just Barbara's death that burdens her; it's also the fact that she's nearly alone with the knowledge that feels particularly heavy.

Then she thinks of Jonathan, and how much easier it is to deal with everything when he's around. He's been a near constant in her life since...well since everything happened and she almost feels bad for leaning on him so much.

But really, Jonathan is the only one that really gets it.

When she finally does break up with Steve, it kind of hurts. Nancy really does like him, but she can't really give herself to him, and that's what he deserves. He's confused and tries to convince her otherwise, but it doesn't do any good.

Jonathan finds her after school and offers her a ride home. She accepts, and doesn't fail to notice how comfortable it is to be around him. She thinks about Steve and lets out a sigh.

"What's wrong?" He doesn't even need to look at her to know that something is askew.

Nancy looks at him, and his eyes are focused on the road in front of them and she wonders when it was she found him to be attractive and whether or not it matters.

"Steve and I...we're not," she pauses, "I- we broke up."

Jonathan just nods. "You okay?"

She is. It's just one less thing-person, to worry about. "Yeah. I am," she says.

As they sit in silence she thinks about what the secretary told her about how Jonathan was in love with her, and at the time she refused to think about it. But now? Maybe it wasn't just the past keeping her from really wanting to be with Steve. Maybe it was the feelings that have been creeping up on her ever since Jonathan and her have become closer.

Maybe the reason is Jonathan Byers.

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She tells him she doesn't want to go home right away, so he asks

where she wants to go, but all he gets is a shrug in return. Not knowing what else to do, he turns his car down the road to his house.

When they step through the doorway, it's clear that they're alone. He hears her whisper 'wow' under her breath, and he gets it. The house is a reflection of Joyce Byers' mental state, and now it looks nothing like *before*. It's cleaner, calmer, imperfections covered under a layer of paint.

She sits on the sofa as he goes to grab a couple of bottles of soda for them. He sets them on the coffee table and wipes his palms on his thighs before sitting down next to her.

They sit together, and there's no music or television on. She reaches for his hand and holds it. He thinks that perhaps by just being here, she's triggered but she's smiling up at him.

He takes a chance and releases his hand to pull her by the arm closer to him. She doesn't resist and lies comfortably on his shoulder. He closes his eyes and rests his cheek on her hair. This is perfect really.

"Everything is better, you know? When I'm with you it's just," she nuzzles a little closer, "better. Like everything will be okay."

He opens his eyes and stares at the space in front of him. "Everything will be better. I think we just need time." He hopes she can't feel the rapid beating of his heart because she's so close and now every time they're together it's been getting harder and harder to keep his feelings buried.

He can feel her begin to pull away, so he lets go. But instead of sitting up she's still *right here*, looking up at him.

"I think what I need...is you." Nancy punctuates that statement by leaning up and kissing him. And it's everything Jonathan never dared hope for.

Her lips are so soft and he can smell her skin, and when she climbs on his lap a little he thinks he may lose his mind.

She's everything and this kiss is everything and the pieces all seem to fall into place.

OoO

Nancy pulls away and stares into his eyes and there's so much behind them. The kiss was what she wanted-needed, and once again Jonathan was there for her.

She grabs the back of his head to pull him to her again, and the two of them together like this feels *perfect* and *right*. How being with someone should be. He's gentle and kind and just so...everything she wants.

She's never been the type to jump from boy to boy, but now she knows how much time she's wasted by not being here. It's never felt this way with Steve.

He pulls away this time and looks down at her lap or her sweater, or something, "Nancy, I-"

She grabs his face so he'll look at her. She *knows* what he's trying to say. She smiles, "Me too."

His eyes grow wide and search her face. All she does is nod and smile. He huffs out a little laugh and smiles too.

They don't really need to say anything because they understand each other. They get each other.